

Hallucinatory Realism in the Mandarin World

PRASANNA K CHOUDHARY

1.

Thank you Guan Moye.

Your Nobel Prize this year introduced and made quite popular the two words – hallucinatory realism. While the Latin American authors are credited with introducing the cult of magical realism, you happen to be the pioneer of this new genre. Critics point to the similarities between the ‘magical’ and the ‘hallucinatory’, yet there is difference, and this difference betrays the difference between Latin America and contemporary China.

There is no hallucination without reality, and no reality without hallucination. They are two sides of a contradiction – a duality of opposites in unity. Yes. Here one can easily discern the stamp of Mao Zedong’s philosophical theory of ‘unity in contradiction’. Mao wrote, “Duality is an attribute of all things, and for all time. Of course, duality is manifested through different concrete forms, and so the character of things varies.” Guan Moye, who was supposed ‘not to speak’, speaks in his hallucinatory avatar as Mo Yan – the real name manifests itself in hallucinatory nom de plume. All that is real is hallucination, and all that is hallucination, is real.

Here, however, I do not intend to discuss Mo Yan. The point is the hallucinatory realism of the past century.

2.

Think in terms of the centuries to apprehend the hallucinatory realism of the struggle between capitalism and communism of the past century. Communism was declared the greatest enemy of capitalism, while the communists claimed to rid the world of the vices of capitalism.

Now check the hard facts. Or should I choose Deng Xiaoping’s words of ‘seeking truth from facts’?

Capital’s greatest foe is capital itself. All the major and minor wars, including the two World Wars, in the past couple of centuries were fought among capitalist nations. Pearl Harbour, Hiroshima or Nagasaki were not destinations in communism’s ‘evil empire’. And the communists did not plot the Great Depression of 1929. Similarly, the implosion of the Soviet Empire in 1990s was not caused by capitalists’ missile, and Deng Xiaoping (credited with ushering in the capitalist upsurge in China) was himself a veteran communist.

In today’s world, perhaps the largest number of small, medium and big capitalists have been born and brought up in communist countries – and these new generations of ‘communist’ capitalists are

now marching ahead of their older, Western counterparts. The most recent batch of capitalists is now emerging from among the Maoist ranks in Nepal.

In fact, in colonial, semi-colonial and backward countries (victims of capitalist-imperialist aggression, oppression and hegemony), nationalist movements, naturally, passed through their 'do not speak capitalism' moments or periods in different forms. Under these circumstances, the reality of capitalism manifested itself in hallucinatory nom de plume of communism.

It was during the Anti-Japanese War of Resistance (1937-45) that the Chinese Communist Party under the leadership of Mao Zedong decisively won the leadership of the Chinese nation, and, finally, in 1949, pushed the Kuomintang out of the ring. The resurgent Chinese nation then embarked on the path of rapid industrialization. Communists have always been obsessed with the development of the industrialized West and hoped to beat them in this regard as soon as possible. In his 'Reading Notes on the Soviet Text *Political Economy*' (1961-2), Mao wrote, "As things now stand, in another three years we may surpass England in output of primary industrial products. In another five years, we can fulfil our task of establishing the industrial system as a practical reality. In the long term, we expect to be known as an industrial-agricultural nation. Even if we make over 100 million tons of steel, it will still be so. If our per capita output were to surpass Great Britain's, we would need to be producing 350 million tons of steel at least! There is a special significance to picking out a country and competing with it. We are always talking about catching up with England. Our first step is to catch up in terms of primary product output, next in terms of per capita output. In ship-building and motor vehicle manufacture we are still far behind that country. We must strive to overtake it in all respects. Even so small a country as Japan has four million tons' capacity of commercial shipping. It is inexcusable for a country as large as ours to lack the shipping to move our own goods. In 1949, we had 90,000 or more sets of machine tools. By 1959 the number had increased to 4,90,000. In 1957, Japan had 6,00,000. The number of machine tools is an important index of the level of industrial development. Labour productivity in Soviet industry has not as yet surpassed that of the United States. We are even further behind. Though our population is very large, our labour productivity is a long way from comparing with that of others. From 1960 on we will still have to work intensively for thirteen years."

In absence of colonial system and direct slavery, and of course, in view of the international situation of that time, providing primary accumulation to finance industrialization was a stupendous task. After land reforms, massive political campaigns were launched, and concurrent administrative steps were taken to ready the working masses, particularly the peasants, to 'sacrifice' for this primary accumulation in order to build a new socialist and communist society. Mao noted, "In the Soviet Union accumulated capital amounts to one-fourth of the national income. In China, the figures were as follows – 27% in 1957, 36% in 1958, 42% in 1959, and it appears that in the future it will be possible to maintain regularly a figure of over 30% It is our regular responsibility to practice economies and to accumulate large amounts of materials and wealth. It would be wrong to think that this should be done only in adverse conditions. It is difficult to believe that when hardships ease economies and accumulation are not needed. When a communist society is attained, labour discipline is bound to be even more strict than it is presently because the high level of automation will require even higher exactitude of people's labour and conduct." (Translation of Mao's quotations by Moss Roberts)

3.

In the background of the Cultural Revolution, and his own experiences, Deng Xiaoping had to move cautiously while initiating his readjustment programme. Yet he set the stage for the final lap of the transformation. 'Do not speak capitalism' regime was very much diluted, but not abandoned. Colour of the cat loses its significance, and getting rich is glorified along with four cardinal principles. The revolutionary-era political structure of 'three-in-one' (an organic unity of party, army and government) continued and further consolidated. Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought (with the later addition of Deng's Theory and Jiang Zemin's Theses of Three Represents) continued to be the guiding ideology of the Chinese nation, and there was no question of diluting the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party.

4.

After three decades of high double-digit growth, China is now one of the chief engines of global capitalism (of course, with all its vices as well). It is all set to become the largest economy in the next decade. While it is premature to undermine the economic strength of the United States or the West as a whole, it is also foolhardy to deny the rise of China as a great Power in the current century. After all, China is a great nation of more than 1.3 billion people, it has a glorious history of thousands of years, and its contribution to the material and cultural wealth of humankind is, by all accounts, quite immense and well-recorded. A hundred years (1845-1949) of imperialist aggression and hegemony is just a minor episode in its long history.

Now, as the most vibrant capitalist economy with immense untapped potential, China's 'do not speak capitalism' regime is gone forever, and so the hallucinatory realism associated with it. The reality of capitalism now does not need any hallucinatory nom de plume. It is time for China to dismantle the edifice of hallucinatory realism embedded in its political structure. It will be quite interesting to see how its next generation of leadership handle this task of dismantling, and how does this process affect the world at large. China faces more challenges ahead (as a rising capitalist power) than any time in the past.
